

Transitioning from the Classroom to the Field of Social Work;

Incorporating Secondary Traumatic Stress
education and support into the curriculum

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Introductions

- Presenters
- Attendees

Today's Objectives

- Be able to describe the various symptoms of secondary trauma as well as those scope and pervasiveness of the issue.
- Identify the impact secondary trauma has on students and what faculty can do to provide effective educational preparedness and classroom support.
- Integrate secondary traumatic stress education and support to students at their institutions (across the social work field education curriculum).

| Required Internships | Curriculum | Semesters/Hours required | Expectations |
|---|--|---|--|
| Introductory Field Experience (SCWK 191) **52 enrolled last summer | Summer after freshman year. *Placement is secured by the student, with faculty approval | 12 weeks, summer semester *120 Hours | Allow the student to "get their feet wet", interact with professionals, practice basic helping skills. |
| BSW Senior Field Placement (SCWK 491/2) **41 currently enrolled | Completed during the student's final year in the program. *Placed by Field Director | Two consecutive semesters or one "block" semester. *240 hours/semester | Primary goal is to allow student to integrate curriculum into beginning social work role. |
| MSW Foundation Year (SCWK 591/2) **8 currently enrolled | Completed during the first year of the MSW Traditional Program. *Placed by Field Director | Two consecutive semesters. *240 hours/semester | Primary goal is to allow student to integrate curriculum into beginning social work role. |
| MSW Clinical Placement (SCWK 691/2/3) **46 currently enrolled | Completed the student's final year in the MSW Program. | Three consecutive semesters, starting in the fall. *240 hours/semester | Placement is specific to clinical social work. |

Case Study

- "Leah" is a first year, advanced standing student who started her internship in August 2019. She called her field director the day after she started, was very emotional on the phone saying she was unsure if she could work with "kids in the school". Leah has a significant history of childhood trauma. One of her parents passed away suddenly when she was in middle school. She and her siblings were then placed with her other parent who lived out of state and who they had had very little prior contact. In speaking with Leah later that week, she identified that she was experiencing trauma symptoms when she was in the school setting, likely due to the many visits by workers when SHE was in the school setting.

Secondary Traumatic Stress & Burnout

Over time, if STS goes untreated/unrecognized, this can lead to burnout in one's professional and personal life.

Burnout – “A syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that occurs frequently among individuals who do “people-work” of some kind. A key aspect of burnout is increased feelings of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a diminished sense of personal accomplishments” (Maslach & Johnson, 1981b, p. 99).

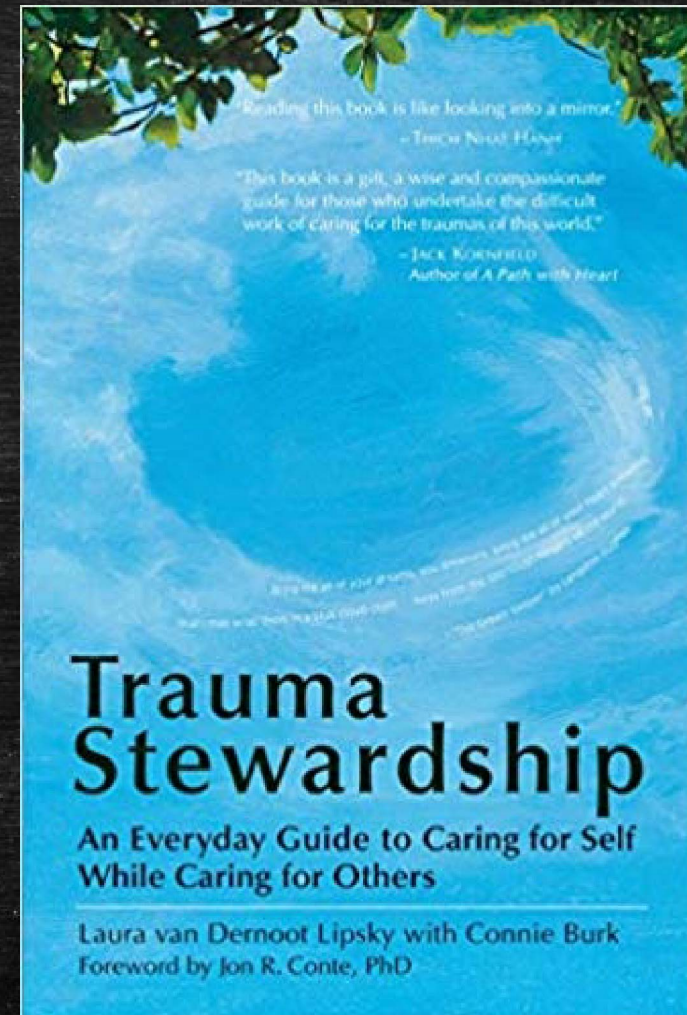
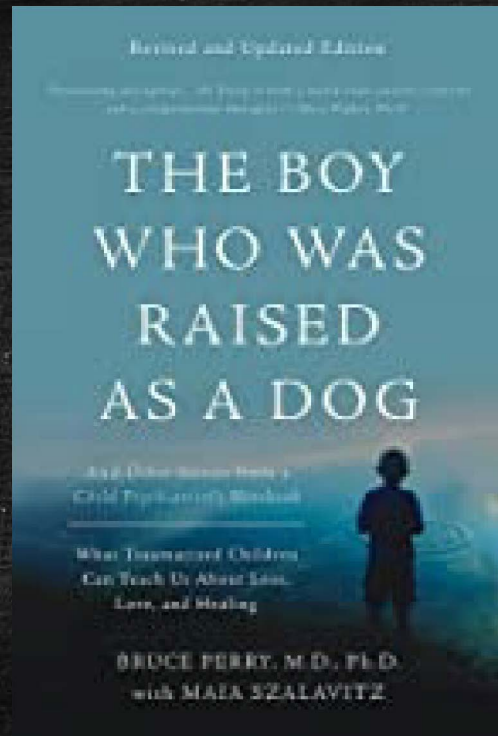
“A process in which a previously committed professional disengages from his or her work in response to stress and strain experienced in the job” (Cherniss, 1980, p 18)



Discussion Question- 10 minutes

- Why is it so important to teach about self-care?
- Why is it so difficult to teach students about self-care??
- Any tips/resources to share with others at your table?





Prevalence of STS in Social Work

- As helping professionals, social workers are particularly susceptible to symptoms of STS.
- Landmark study (Bride, 2007) surveyed 600 LMSW's in the State of California.
 - Response rate of 49%, answered questions related to secondary trauma and symptomology.
 - 40.5% respondents indicated they think of traumatized clients when not intending to; 31.6% indicated they avoid clients.; 19% reported intrusive thoughts; and 11% avoided places, people and things that remind them of working with traumatized clients.
 - 70% reported one symptom of STS within the past week and 15% met the core criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Preparing Clinicians for Trauma Work

- Conflicting research indicating how to teach/prepare students for working with clients who are experiencing, or who have experienced, trauma.
- Evidence supports the idea of preparing clinicians in advance for challenges associated with working with trauma survivors may have protective effect when looking at rates of secondary trauma and eventual burnout (Bell, et al., 2003; Dane, 2000).
- Insufficient empirical studies and data to address the questions of how to help students across the social work curriculum to work directly with those experiencing trauma.
- Of further concern is the number of students who themselves report trauma in their backgrounds.

Prevalence of Personal Trauma Among Students in Field Placement (BSW & MSW)

- A quantitative, anonymous online survey of 1,500 undergraduate students – 85% reported having experienced traumatic event in their lifetime.
- 21% reported experiencing a traumatic event over a 2-month period during college:
- The study found most common traumatic events include; accidents, sexual assault, experiencing unwanted sexual attention, family violence, and a loved one surviving a life-threatening event.

Frazier, P., Anders, S., & Perera, S. (2009).

Prevalence of Personal Trauma Among Students in Field Placement (BSW & MSW)

- In another quantitative study 129 graduate students given survey to assess their personal history and trauma background
- 38.7% reported history of personal trauma (Adams & Riggs, 2008).
- Another study showed that MSW students often come from families where alcohol and drug problems occur when compared to other majors (Esaki & Larkin, 2013).
- 73% of MSW students experienced one or more problems defined as having a dysfunctional family.

Prevalence of Personal Trauma Among Students in Field Placement (BSW & MSW)

- Further study surveyed 162 MSW students and asked that they complete an ACEs survey.
 - 80% reported at least one adverse childhood experience
 - 27.3% reported having four or more adverse experiences
 - 22.4% reported having no adverse experiences
 - Types of adverse experiences include separation/divorce, substance abuse, sexual abuse, physical abuse, or incarcerated household members (Gilin & Kauffman, 2015).

Discussion Question- 10 min

- What is our role in placing students?
- How do we know/assess their capacity for what they can handle in their placement?
- What considerations/how do we determine this?

Prevalence of STS Among Students in Field Placement (BSW & MSW)

- In order to understand the need for trauma education across the curriculum we must look at the prevalence of STS among students.
- Sample 58 undergraduate and graduate social work students
 - During practicum – 84% reported becoming emotional upset after meeting with a client and 69% became emotionally upset after reading a case file (Didham, Dromgole, Csiernik, Karley, & Hurley, 2011).

Prevalence of STS Among Students in Field Placement (BSW & MSW)

- Quantitative study conducted – BSW students and respective field instructors surveyed.
 - Sample size = 42 BSW students and 51 field instructors
 - Administered Trauma and Attachment Belief Scale and Professional Quality of Life Scale along with answering demographic questions.
 - 95% of students and 98% of instructors indicated negative reactions when working with clients.
 - 40% of students said they felt "not at all" or "somewhat" prepared for working with clients in their practicum.

Prevalence of STS Among Students in Field Placement (BSW & MSW)

- Exploratory study, qualitative methodology using semi-structured individual interviews
 - Sample size (12 MSW graduating students)
 - Themes Included: Emotional reactions based on field experiences; Concerns occurred regarding lack of agency support around feelings of distress; and Emotional triggers of previous trauma based on client stressors/disclosures.

Litvack, A., Bogo, M., & Mishna, F. (2010)



Discussion Question – 10 min

- How far should Field Directors push students out of comfort zone in field placements?
- Differences between BSW (freshman vs senior) and MSW placements (foundation vs clinical)?



What Can Social Work Faculty Do

- Need to understand that classroom safety is imperative (what is classroom safety).
- Encourage students to recognize it! Name it! Talk about it, with someone who understands and can help! (faculty, internship supervisors, classmates/colleagues, or a trained therapist).
- Recognize vulnerability, assume there is an unknown subset of students who are at a heightened risk for re-traumatization or vicarious trauma given the content presented or the experience.
- Consider assessing students for indirect trauma utilizing assessment tools, checklists and self-assessments.
- Normalize that students might have a personal history of past traumatic experiences, view them as a form of resilience.
- Address the "psychological shattering of one's worldview"

What Can Social Work Faculty Do

- Encourage students to not inhibit the thoughts/feelings you are having (Pennebaker, 1990) – inhibition is physical work and it affects short-term biological changes in blood pressure & heart rate and can also impact long-term health.
- Maintain professional boundaries with students. Should the relationship become too personal, consider suggesting personal therapy.
- Consider the importance of specialized courses within the curriculum that are designed to prepare students for work with trauma survivors.
- Encourage students to voice their needs and concerns and teach to importance of self-care (physically, psychologically, emotionally, spiritually, professionally) It matters!
- Gain commitment from organizations, hosting students in field placements to provide supplemental support to students.

What is FSU doing and what are/can you do?

- Intentional STS education that is scaffolded throughout the curriculum, particularly in field orientation and field seminar.
- Surveying to assess students for pre-field experienced trauma.
- Developing a survey to obtain feedback from students regarding what they know about STS and what they need to assist them in coping.
- Discussing the importance of STS support for students with field instructors and agencies.
- Your turn. What are you doing and/or hope to do?



Questions/Comments?



- Please take a moment to complete the evaluation!

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